

# Clay County Alabama



Compiled & Edited by Wayne Scott Ray



**hmspress.ca**

**HMS Press  
P O Box 340 Station B  
London Ontario N6A 4W1**

**[hmspublishing@yahoo.ca](mailto:hmspublishing@yahoo.ca)**

**ISBN 978-1-55253- 89-4**

**Available as an e-book only**

## Lineville, Clay County, Alabama

Native Americans were the first peoples to inhabit the area now known as Lineville. The Creek Indian War of 1813, resulted in their removal. The first White settlers in the area were William and Thomas Lundie. Their settlement was known as Lundie's Cross Roads after a trading post opened in the 1830's to serve pioneers and miners searching for gold.<sup>(1)</sup>

"The first known impact on this area caused by gold was in 1540, when the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto ravaged the region in search of the golden treasures of "El Dorado." Finding only a few gold artifacts made by the Indians, DeSoto continued his expedition to the west where he met his fate in 1541 in what is now Mississippi. Gold was first discovered by the white man in the American Southeast in the Carolinas in 1799. Shortly afterwards, prospectors made a major strike in Georgia in 1829 and shortly afterward the town of Dahlonega (The word for gold in Cherokee Indian) . By following the crystalline rock laden mountain chain southward, prospectors soon discovered the yellow metal in what is now Villa Rica, Georgia and shortly thereafter Alabama in 1830. The Alabama gold discovery was in an area that includes the nine present counties of Randolph, Cleburne, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Chambers, Clay, Coosa, Elmore and Chilton. Ironically, this was the same portion of east Alabama that the Creek Indians were allocated and forced into following their defeat at Horseshoe Bend in the Creek War of 1813-14. After the 1830 strike, white prospectors began to illegally pour into the Indian lands in search of gold. Unable to stem the flood of illegal settlers into east Alabama, President Andrew Jackson invoked the provisions of the Indian Removal Act and the Treaty of Cussetta earlier than planned, and forced the Creeks and other Indians to lands west of the Mississippi River. So, once again, the yellow metal had caused wealth for some and a great loss for others!"

The next white settlers were Robert C. Wilson and his brother-in-law Mark E. Moore, who settled on land grant property to the west of the Lundies in 1836. Instead of moving into the east Alabama lands from Georgia as most of the early settlers did, apparently the Wilsons and Moores moved in from St. Clair County. St. Clair was one of the Alabama counties established in the 1816-1819 period that bordered the Creek Indian lands on the west. Family stories show that some of the early settlers reached these counties by rafting down the Coosa River from Georgia, instead of using the traditional overland routes.<sup>(2)</sup>

In 1856, Lundie's Cross Roads became as the County Line, which was the boundary line between Talladega and Randolph Counties. In 1856, as well, a post office was established on County Line, schools were consolidated and corn and cotton became cash crops.

The Town of (Crooked Creek) Lineville was built on what was at that time the dividing line between Talladega and Randolph Counties, hence the name, Lineville. John H. Ingram, Sr. of Lineville, Alabama furnishes the following early history: "Crooked Creek Baptist Church, later Lineville, was organized in 1839 and built one and one quarter miles west of the town of Lineville about 200 yards northwest of the home of Frank Pittard; and the first literary school of the community was nearby. Some years later the church was moved a short distance and a house was built on the left side of the public road near the residence of the late Thomas H. Harris. In about 1863 the church was moved into the town of Lineville and a house built just west of the present grammar school building; the name was changed to Lineville Baptist Church in 1881 and legally incorporated in 1912; the first Circuit Court that was held in the new County of Clay, was held in the Lineville Baptist Church in 1867, with John Henderson of Talladega, Alabama, as a judge. The present new brick building was built in 1915 and 1916, with the first service held on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1916, with prayer

and thanksgiving service conducted by J.H. Ingram, Sr., and C.N. James, pastor.”<sup>(3)</sup>

In addition to gold, the east Alabama area has over sixty other minerals, such as arsenic, copper, graphite, mica, and pyrite. Many of these minerals were mined commercially at various times in history, thereby contributing to the economy of the area. For example, near the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were over sixty graphite mines in the area, most of which were in nearby Clay County.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Civil War saw some 56 men interred in the Old Lineville Cemetery. By the end of the war, Confederate money had become useless and the area suffered many hardships. Clay County formed in 1866. The town’s name was officially changed to Lineville in 1870 when it became the temporary seat of government for Clay County.<sup>(5)</sup>

Lineville, in its early years had a small women’s college. This entry is from the only surviving brochure on the history of Lineville College 1896.

#### General Statement

Lineville is situated in the eastern part of Clay County, Alabama. The town and surrounding country are elevated and healthful. Lineville is free from those temptations which arise from saloons, gambling dens, and other places of ill-repute. Church privileges are good. The people are refined and religious.

Patrons may feel assured that their children here are not subjected to those temptations which pupils so often meet while attending school in large towns and cities. For strict morality, temperance and good citizenship, Lineville is admitted by those who ought to know to be unsurpassed in the State of Alabama. We confidently claim that no school in this section of the country offers advantages superior to those afforded by this old, reliable school. We refer to any and all of our patrons as to the efficiency and thoroughness of the instruction given. We believe that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well. We have no royal road to education; no lightening express train to haul passengers of every degree to Diploma Station for his life’s work. If the foundation is imperfectly laid, the superstructure can not stand long. Our motto is “Education rather than graduation.” Students who prize the latter more than the former may be accommodated elsewhere. We have no method of making teachers of any and every student until they learn something to teach. We do honest, thorough work and guarantee satisfaction in the case of every pupil. Indolent, incorrigible students are not wanted in this school. We want to give value received for all money paid to us for tuition. Pupils who desire to attend school because they have nothing else to do, or who do so with the idea they will not have an abundance of work to do, need not enter this school. We want only pupils who desire to learn and are willing to study. To such, every possible chance is given, and no effort on the part of the teachers will be spared to advance such pupils.

In entering upon the fourth year under the present management we extend to our patrons a hearty thanks for their support without which we could not have attained such phenomenal success. A united pull on the part of the local citizenship is all that is required to keep Lineville College as it deserves to be - the leader in Clay County schools.

#### Co-education:

The universities and colleges of the country are now just fully awakening to the fact that no good reason exists for stubbornly maintaining the old idea of separate schools for young men and young ladies. While their minds and intellects are admittedly on an equal, it is a patent fact that their association in the class room can be wholesome in its effect upon both. No unnecessary communication between sexes allowed during session.



*Lineville College students (Ola Elizabeth Gay age 18 - center)*

**Board of Trustees**

W.D. Haynes

W.H. Blake

W.B. Smith

J.A. Bell

William Smith

**Schools**

School of Mathematics: H.J. Willingham

School of Natural and Physical Sciences: Prof. Samuel Aughey

School of Latin & Greek J.F. Willingham

School of Modern Languages: H.J. & J.F. Willingham

School of English: H.J. & J.F. Willingham & Miss May Willingham

Intermediate Studies: H.J. Willingham & Miss May Willingham

Preparatory Department: Mrs. Annie Waits

School of Vocal and Instrumental Music: Miss Claudia Evans

School of Art & Physical Culture and Elocution: Miss Eloise Montgomery <sup>(6)</sup>

In 1898, Lineville was incorporated, graphite mining became a major industry and the National Bank began operations. As previously mentioned, Lineville College opened in 1891 with its President and Mathematics teacher, H.J. Willingham, appointed its first Mayor. In 1907 the first railroad began operations, the timber industry expanded and a high school opened. In 1917, Lineville received water and electricity. <sup>(7)</sup>

## Ashland and Clay County, Alabama

Ashland is a town with a population of about 2000. It is the county seat of Clay County. It was formed by an act of the Alabama General Assembly on December 7, 1866. Less than a year later, Ashland was established as the county seat.

Clay County seems to have an evasive identity - a split personality of sorts. The county is at once an island that is isolated by both nature and man, while at the same time it is encircled and influenced by an array of nearby modern cities. From its earliest days, Clay County has been isolated on the west by the rugged expanse of the Talladega Mountains, with their dense forests and natural gaps. To the east, the region has been blocked by the deep defiles and swift currents of the Tallapoosa River. Today, there is only one railroad line, no interstate highways, only one small airport and no navigable waterways. These factors tend to keep Clay County off the beaten path. Clay County's 66,800 remote acres within the Talladega National Forest further adds to its sense of isolation. And finally, although the county is ringed by the cities of Atlanta (80 direct miles to the east), Birmingham (55 direct miles to the west), and Montgomery (65 direct miles to the south); all of these lie outside reasonable commuting distance. These natural and man made barriers have somewhat isolated Clay County. Although it is located at the extreme end of the mountain chain, it is Alabama's best and most intact example of the geographic features and culture known as "Appalachia."<sup>(1)</sup>

During the early days, citizens of Talladega and Randolph Counties were isolated from their court houses in Talladega and Wedowee respectively by the mountains to their west and the Tallapoosa River to their east. Clay County was formed from a six mile section of eastern Talladega and a six mile section of western Randolph Counties. The donation of private land near the center of the new county determined the location of the county seat at Ashland, much to the chagrin of Lineville residents. Education in Clay County began with as many as 67 "field schools." These largely one-room log schools usually had only one teacher for all grades. Over the years, with improved transportation and roads, the county schools had been consolidated to two, and soon had a single county school. The ethnicity of the early Clay County residents was largely Scot, Irish or Scot-Irish. The county's early blacks were from either Creek Indian or white planter ownership. The shallow top soil of the area kept farm incomes low. With the railroad coming through the county in 1907, large logging operations such as Kaul Limber Company of Hollins, and the discovery of large graphite and other mineral deposits, the economy improved somewhat. The county reached an apex in population in the early 1920s with over 22,000 residents.<sup>(2)</sup>

During the early years of the County, Ashland grew rapidly with the opening of Alabama's first graphite mine in 1899. In the 1930's the Great Depression took its toll and the Boll Weevil destroyed the cotton industry. Farmers were forced to abandon what had been the communities major industry.<sup>(3)</sup>

One of the newest attractions in Clay County in the 1920's, was the chicken business. Millions of chickens and eggs and long chicken houses In or about 1921, Reverend Secelar Claxton Ray took one hundred, day-old chicks to the Clay County Fair and put them under an oil burning brooder and called attention to the advantage of using chickens on the farm to supplement the 'all cotton' cash crop. This was something new, but it did gradually get the attention of the local farmers. He was now fully in the poultry business, and named it Goodwill Poultry Farm and Hatchery. He bought houses then idle at the local graphite mines in Clay

County and hired neighbors in their spare time and built the hatchery and chicken houses and an extra tenant house on the farm, southeast of Ashland, Alabama whose population of close to one thousand had grown considerably from two hundred in 1881.



“The Reverend Secelar Claxton Ray IV (1888 - 1977) (S.C. Ray, Ethyl & Claxton, 1917) was a Baptist Preacher in and around Clay County, Alabama from 1924 to 1968. He was born on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1888 to William Ephraim Ray (1858 - 1891) and Sara Melissa (Carr) Ray (1854 - 1940). S.C. Ray had two brothers, Levie (1882 - 1899) and William Ephraim Ray Jr. (1891 - ) and one sister, Roxie Ray (1883 - 1887). His father died on the same day of a fever (the doctor gave him arsenic powder instead of aspirin powder). He was born on his father’s one hundred twenty acre farm, one mile south of Lystra Baptist Church, four miles southeast of Ashland, Alabama. The family lived there until December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1908. He was a very active child but succumbed to Roseola and Scarlet Fever and was left with constant ear aches. When he was fourteen years old he was ‘saved’ and joined the church at Sardis in 1902.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1908 the family bought one hundred acres, one and a half miles north of Lystra Church and moved on it with his Grandfather and Grandmother Carr. He entered the first session of Clay County High School at Ashland when it opened in the fall of 1909 and obtained a license to teach school in the public school system of Alabama in May 1910. He taught summer school for six

weeks at Lystra in 1911 and taught at a two-teacher school in Union Grove in the winter of 1910 and the summer of 1911. He then taught at a one-teacher school at Nappier just south of Ashland in the Fall and Winter of 1911 and the Summer of 1912. He married Maude Ethyl Runyan on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1912.

By 1914 he was the clerk and the treasurer of Lystra Church. He also taught at a one-teacher school at Bellview, two and a half miles north of Lineville, in the winter of 1914 and the summer of 1915. His wife, Maude Ethyl obtained a license to teach and taught at Mellow Valley School in the winter of 1915 and the summer of 1916. S.C. Ray was ordained a Baptist Minister at Lystra in March 1924, and was called to pastor at twenty-one churches between 1924 and 1968. He was clerk of the Carey Association of Churches from 1936 to 1951.

In 1932 there was a fire in the hatchery and the broiler house with a loss of four thousand dollars. He operated the chicken business until 1951. At that time the local farmers had a hard time because of the Depression and the Federal Land Bank of New Orleans appointed him as their Field Representative to help the borrowers of Clay County and Talladega County. The bank furnished a new Chevrolet and the Land Bank paid the expenses to operate it. The U.S. Congress passed the REA Act that built power and telephone lines in the rural parts of America.

In 1970, his arthritis began to act up and due to infirmities at the age of eighty-two, they gave up housekeeping and sold the lot and house and went into a housing project in Ashland in June, 1971. Ethyl had another operation and on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1972 he flew to Woodstock, Ontario, to live with Claxton and his family. The Reverend Secelar Claxton Ray lived a quiet end of life with his son and family in Woodstock, Ontario and when called for Christmas supper at 5pm on December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1977, was found dead, sitting in his rocking chair”.<sup>(4)</sup>

The ethnicity of the early Clay County residents was largely Scot, Irish or Scot-Irish. The county's early blacks were from either Creek Indian or white planter ownership. The livelihood of most early county settlers consisted of "one horse" subsistence farming and living off the land. However, with the land eventually cleared for larger farms, the economy shifted to one of an ill fated corn and cotton cash crop system. The shallow top soil of the area kept farm income low. With the railroad coming through the county in 1907, large logging operations such as Kaul Lumber Company of Hollins, and the discovery of large graphite and other mineral deposits, the economy improved somewhat. During the mid to late 1950s, large paper companies introduced artificial reforestation to the area with the establishment of thousands of acres of loblolly pine plantations. With the advent of federal and state cost shares provided to local farmers, they too enjoined the pine plantation boom. About the same time, the chicken and cattle industry spread quickly in the county [as previously mentioned, ed.].

After decades of low income cash crop row farming, the citizens of Clay County had finally hit upon a diversified economy suited to these rocky hills that continues until this day. With 90 percent of the county being in forest land, forestry and forest products industry remained Clay's primary economy. This industry includes the forest landowners, logging crews, forest rangers, 66,800 acres of the county in Talladega National Forest, cabinet plants, saw mills, floor/roof truss plants, and those individuals such as surveyors, consulting foresters, heavy equipment operators and others that support the industry. The often explosive history, rugged landscape, and hardscrabble economic existence of Clay County natives has produced a breed of people with a great deal of individualism, grit and determination. These traits tend to set them apart as somewhat unique. It has also produced many individuals from humble backgrounds that have achieved fame beyond our county borders. Although it has not been well publicized, Clay County does in fact have an extensive history.<sup>(5)</sup>



## Appendix A

### Autobiography of Rev. S.C. Ray

*Some Thoughts on the Bible as the Word of God* by Reverend S. C. Ray, Temple Press

Born on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1888. My parents were William Ephraim Ray and Sara Melissa (Carr) Ray. My father was born n December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1858 and my mother was born on December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1854. They were married in 1881. My mother's brother, Wesley Carr and his wife, Josie, had seven children: Buna, Houston, R.Z., J.C., Rex, Dewey, and Irvin. They al moved to Texas in 1906 and raised their family around the Girard, Texas area. My mother's youngest sister, Minnie and her husband, Monroe Brown, had six girls; Gladys, Mittice, Earl, Clara, Inola, and Evie. They moved to Oklahoma in 1906 around Rocky, Oklahoma. The Walter P. Truitt family of eight children grew up nearby us and were close friends. Their children were; Bud, Della, Grover, Otis, Shellie, Dewey, Gay and a younger sister. Della married Ross Hood and remained in Clay County. The rest of the family moved to Oklahoma in 1906 along with the Brown family, in and around Rocky, Oklahoma. My wife's mother's brother, John England and his wife married in Clay County but moved to Van Alstine, Texas in the early 1900's and raised six boys and seven girls.

My oldest brother, Levie, was born March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1882 and my only sister, Roxie was born on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1883, and my baby brother, William Ephraim Jr. was born on November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1891. My father died on the same day of a fever (the doctor gave him arsenic powder instead of aspirin powder). His death was unexpected. He was a strong man. My mother was a widow until August, 1940, for 49 years. My sister also died about 1887.

I was born on my father's one hundred twenty acre farm, one mile south of Lystra Baptist Church, four miles southeast of Ashland, Alabama. My mother was unable to carry on here without a father and she took us three boys to live on her father's section of land about five miles south, where I lived until December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1908. Mother tells me that when I was eight months old I was pushing a chair, strong and very active. I took Roseola, she thought it was, and I was two years old when I was able to push that chair again. It could have been Scarlet Fever, for I was left with constant ear aches, and a large growth in my right ear that would sometimes discharge. I also had a case of Catarrh in the head and throat, with constant drainage that has followed me. I had an adenoid removed in 1907 that stopped the earache and the growth and discharge in the right ear, but gave me no hearing in my right ear.

In 1874, when my mother was twenty years old, she drove one of nine ox wagons from Millerville, Alabama in Clay County, to the state of Arkansas. She was nine weeks on the road. Mother was a lovely, strong woman of good courage and she put that hoe handle in those lovely hands and she did more than her part, and we had a good living. Levie soon learned to plow and keep the middles plowed while my uncles plowed the row and mother did the hoeing, worked outside in the fields, gathered wood for the fireplace and cookstove, looked after the chickens, cows, ducks, and geese ad at night she carded the wool into rolls and then she spun them into thread. She took this thread into the big cellar and in a large loom she would weave it into cloth and make our clothes. After a while, Levie could lay off the rows to plant corn and would cry because he would get them crooked. My mother would tell him that more corn will grow in a crooked row than in a straight one. Tragedy struck again in the summer of 1899, when Levie died of a fever caused from a fall. He was sixteen and the man of the house and all of our joy and crown. I was eleven and William was eight.

Life has its sorrows as well as its joys, and that wonderful mother of mine did well to mourn the loss of my father, my sister, and now that dear brother that was our stay and joy both day and night. Me and my brother also cried with broken hearts. Weeping was for a night but joy came in the morning when my mother took a renewed hold on things and kept on going. I was left with a besetting handicap and was not strong like Levie, but I was 'gritty' and did what I could. Mother was good and kind to us and she was not afraid to live with us alone in a house to ourselves. She was not afraid at nights, nor when the storms would come. She had a great faith in God and kept me and William not afraid, and we all got along well. Praise God!

In the fall of 1901, when I was thirteen, Uncle Jim Carr and I took two bales of cotton to Alex City to sell, about thirty miles away. We took plenty of food in our lunch boxes and quilts and cushions for our pallets at night. The cotton was weighed and sampled at the warehouse, one bale was five-hundred and thirty-two pounds and the other was four-hundred and eighty-five pounds. We put up at the wagon yard overnight and got water from a well in the yard. We went to three or four cotton buyers and sold to the highest bidder, Mr. W.H. Carlisle, at seven and one-half cents per pound. He gave us a sales bill with the total weight of nine-hundred and seventeen pounds, and paid us off. At the wagon yard I told Uncle Jim that I thought it was One thousand and seventeen pounds. He said Mr. Carlisle knew more than we did, but as we got started the next morning I got him to take the bill back and see. The man added the one hundred pounds to the bill and gave me seven dollars and fifty cents cash. When I climbed back upon the wagon, I felt as good as Lindbergh did in France in 1927. I had something for that mother of mine when I got home and she loved me to death. I made a hit with Uncle Jim too.

I was saved and joined the church at Sardis in 1902, when I was fourteen. J.W. Dean baptized me there. I told the church that the Lord had saved me and I wanted to see others saved. That desire has been with me all of these eighty-seven years, and I have seen many saved.

Now, prepare to shed a tear. Another tragedy occurred to this widow. In the summer of 1905, when I was seventeen, my left side became infected with Pleurisy that put me down to near death, in bed for five weeks. One man, Joe H. Mattox, told my mother "*I will be there at one o'clock in the night when you need me the most, for that is the dead hour of the night when all men sleep.*" Joe Mattox came a mile across the bottom land and was there. Our local M.D. nearby came and gave dope (opium) that gave relief. Then he brought his son who had just graduated from college, and drew out of my side, a fluid, with a hollow needle. This helped but the pus got too thick for the needle, so they gave me anesthesia and cut between the ribs to let it out. They came every day and the pus got too thick for the space and it was necessary to cut out a piece of a rib. This was serious now. The whole community came to our rescue. No nurse. No hospital. Dr. Owens and his son said they would try to cut the rib. One had to give the ether and the young doctor did the surgery. It was his first. Lots of folks were there but no one would agree to help the doctor. Renfro Runyan, age nineteen, came up and said he would help the doctor. The doctor told Renfro, "*now when I cut this rib, that stuff will fly in our faces, but don't you turn loose.*" He cut the one and one half inches out and that stuff did fly. They said the buzzards came to look things over and the doctor told my mother, "*He can't live.*" Mother said, "*He will live, God will not do me that way three times hard running,*" as she put it. My father, my sister, and my brother, and now me. I lived, for she got in touch by faith with Him who is life. In Him, we all live and move and have our being.

This took about five weeks. The two doctors drove two horses and we fed both of those big horses and the two doctors each day and the bill was one hundred dollars. I don't remember

that anybody gave my mother a dollar; but we paid it all and by the grace of God and good help (except money) of our neighbors. We all three took courage and just kept on trying to do the best we could with what we had, and it is a joy to say that we three, Mother, Me at seventeen, and William, fourteen, kept on working on that farm and I never was hungry in my life. I always had plenty to eat, to keep from being hungry.

We bought one hundred acres, one and a half miles north of Lystra Church and moved on it December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1908. Grandfather and Grandmother Carr moved there with us. I moved my membership from Sardis to Lystra in July of 1909. I entered the first session of the Clay County High School at Ashland when it opened in the fall of 1909. I obtained a license to teach school in the public schools of Alabama in May 1910. I taught summer school for six weeks, one teacher, at Lystra in 1911. We kept on farming all of the time. I taught at a two-teacher school in Union Grove. Miss Zella Carpenter was the Assistant, just north and near us, the winter of 1910 and the summer of 1911. I made a lot of friends at teaching and I was very happy. I taught at a one-teacher school at Nappier School just south of Ashland in the Fall and Winter of 1911, and the Summer of 1912. I walked four miles to this school twice a day and we kept on farming. I made a lot of friends here. Brother William and I got busy and cut logs on the farm and hauled them to a small sawmill nearby to make lumber to build a nice house and barn. We had one tenant and we had a lot of lumber on hand in 1912 and men came by and we all put up a large log barn in one day, with dinner on the ground.

Life took a turn with me now, for I married Ethyl Runyan on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1912. F.J. Ingram was pastor and officiated. He was also the Probate Judge. I skipped teaching. My brother William married Maggie Stewart in September of 1913 and we all farmed together in 1914 when I bought his part of the farm and he moved away. They had Eva Lanette on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1914, L.M. on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1916, Louise in October 1919, and twins: Flora and Dora on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Grandpa and Grandma (she was blind for fifteen years) moved to Uncle John's at Millerville, Alabama. I had an egg-sized knot removed from my left leg just above the knee on the outside, by Dr. Hudson at Lineville, in the summer of 1914. He and Dr. Hill did the job at our home. The total cost was fifty dollars. We went for Dr. Hudson in a buggy and he looked after me, no charge. The job was perfect and meant a whole lot to me in later life. I also had a light spell of fever that summer with no bad aftereffects.

My Grandpa Prasser Wesley Carr was born in 1826 and died in 1915 at eighty-nine years and Grandma Carr in 1920. She was eighty-eight and had been totally blind for fifteen years.

I was the clerk and the treasurer of Lystra Church in 1914. That year we all built a new church building forty by sixty feet with a sixteen-foot wall all out of Heart Pine and Oak lumber of the best kind. That building is still standing to this day. About six hundred dollars in cash passed through my hands and good carpenters were members, and all the labor was free. This was a glorious time. The sweetest fellowship known to mankind. All day working on many days. Fruits of all kinds, watermelons, dinner on the ground and a fine church going up and good blessings all around. Don't you wish you could have been there? I was.

I taught at a one teacher school at Bellview, two and a half miles north of Lineville, in the winter of 1914 and the summer of 1915. We lived in a small house nearby for school work and went to the farm in April 1915 for a crop, and back in the summer for school. We made a fine lot of good friends there. Ethyl obtained a license to teach and she and I taught at Mellow Valley School in the winter of 1915 and the summer of 1916. Our son and only child, Claxton, was born on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1916. He weighed fourteen pounds. A special gift from God sent down. We

rejoiced greatly and the whole community with us. All was heavenly and everybody was happy. And it is a pity to have to add that a sadness came our way in the form of a hurtful case of arthritis in my joints during this winter of school. The weather was the coldest I ever saw, and the doctor charged us a big price, ten dollars, but since we were both teaching, we got up the ten dollars. Now, after sixty years, I might sometimes wish we had just given him the boy for the ten-dollar bill! As much trouble as he is having to look after me, it could be that Claxton and family might be justified in thinking things might have been better, if we had.

After all, it is now a sweet memory of those days at Mellow Valley. The many precious and lasting friends we had there. I hereby send my warm personal greetings to everybody down there. My last school: My wife and I taught our last school at Union Grove, near by in the winter of 1916, and the summer of 1917. We were both happy in the work but I felt I was not well enough to do the job as well as it should have been done. And we got busy trying to cure the arthritis. The local M.D.'s all around had no help. They suggested that I take hot baths at Hot Springs, Arkansas. I did that for six weeks in October and November 1916. One hundred and seventy-five dollars and no help for the arthritis, but I was advised to pull my teeth, even the sound ones, and tonsils. I did. No help. We were all lonesome now. We yoked up with Jesus and took new courage and asked Him to guide us each day. We all pulled together and worked the best we could at such as we were led to do, and were able to rest at night. We read the bible and prayed daily and attended church regularly.

The Ashland Farm Loan Association elected me as Secretary-Treasurer and farmers came to me to borrow from the Federal Land Bank of New Orleans, Louisiana. Each one must carry insurance on his buildings, and I was appointed Agent and wrote policies. We had one tenant and we all farmed and made our living.

I bought R.R. crossties for three months, January, February, and March of 1920. I had a man at Pyriton, one at Cragford, and one at Malone; and I bought myself at Lineville and kept track of the others. We all covered the places up with ties, but we quit it and I kept on with the farming. We pumped water with a hydraulic ram from a spring nine hundred yards away, into an overhead tank of some three thousand gallons, in twenty-four hours. We had running water, bathroom, hot and cold water. We caught the overflow into a large tank for the barn and garden. This was just fine. I had a natural reservoir dug on a hill that I estimated held one-quarter million gallons. Pumped water from a large branch with a hydraulic ram. Used that water for irrigation that counted up well.

The most outstanding attraction in Clay County today, is the chicken business. Millions of chickens and eggs, and long chicken houses that dim eyes are not able to see the other end. This has not been long true. It had a beginning and that is where I come in. In or about 1921, I took one hundred, day-old chicks to the Clay County Fair and put them under an oil burning brooder and called attention to the advantage of using chickens on the farm to supplement the 'all cotton' cash crop. This was positively something new, but it did gradually get attention. We were now led to go into the poultry business, and named it Goodwill Poultry Farm and Hatchery. We bought houses now idle at the graphite mines in Clay County and used our neighbors in their spare time and built the hatchery and chicken houses and an extra tenant house on the farm, three and one-half miles southeast of Ashland, Alabama. We would have two or three hands full-time and would use the neighbors spare time all along at one dollar per day, plus the noonday meal. Henry Ford made world news when he announced five dollars per day and no dinner, somewhere along later.

The Alabama Power Company would keep promising to bring electricity to us, three and a half miles out, but never did. We bought is a private plant of our own, a Delco Electric System, and had electricity in our home, hatchery, and in the chicken house. We had as many as forty thousand eggs hatching at a time. This became the most attractive place in Clay County. This was really fun and a lot of people came to visit us. People brought me eggs for custom hatching from as far away as Talladega. This is how the present day chicken business got its start.

I was ordained a Baptist Minister at Lystra in March 1924. I was called to pastor at Pleasant Hill, in Chambers County, about thirty miles away in April 1924. I had swapped a pair of mules for a Model T Ford. There were no roads yet, for they were not needed until we got cars. I could make it in the car most of the time, but sometimes would go on the train to Roanoke and they had two or three Fords and would transport me. We had a wonderful time there. All Baptist churches in those days called pastors from October to October. One year at a time. They called me again in October of 1924, for one year. Also did Bowden Grove and Ophilia. I did my first baptizing at Pleasant Hill, four fine young men, a time never to forget.

In October 1925, more churches called me than I could fill, one fourth time, or one Sunday per month. I hated to leave Pleasant Hill, my first love, but it was so far off and others were calling me closer so they let me off. Blessings on them. I was highly honored beyond my dues and it all humbled me. In 1927 at a Revival at Lystra, Sam Ingram and I baptized sixteen on the Friday morning and sixteen more the next morning. I was clerk of the Carey Association of Churches from 1936 to 1951. In 1928, I went to Dr. Boss at Gadsden, Alabama for treatment for three days. No help. Also I went to Dr. Drake, a head specialist in Birmingham, for an operation on the sinus for some ten days all in his office. No hospital, no boarding house and I was alone. Kind of lonesome. In 1928 we built a nice fish pond, and the only one around for miles and it was a lot of fun for the boys and men. No mixed bathing, nor use on Sunday. Claxton was twelve years old and I had a young man who lived on the farm, Johnson, to walk with him and keep him company to school and back, each day. No charge for bathing. I am glad I built it.

A few of us neighbors built a private telephone line and could talk to each other and 'ring central' for a fee. It was wonderful. We got one of the first radios and had to use earphones. I paid eighty-four dollars for the first loud speaker in 1928. We had paid four hundred and fifty dollars for the plant and one hundred and sixty dollars for a set of new batteries. A lot of people could listen to the radio now!

We were now deep in the Depression with all the whole world. This poor boy cried and the Lord heard me and gave me that grace that is sufficient and we kept all things going right on. I am fortunate in that I can now say that we had no unpaid bills, and we paid every day of work as we kept on the farm, poultry and a hatchery, and I was also a pastor at four churches. To top it all off, we had a fire in 1932 in the hatchery and the broiler house, a loss of four thousand dollars. No insurance. We had some loss in sales, but we kept on rebuilding and putting in more incubators, a total of forty thousand egg capacity. I operated the business until 1951, when Uncle Sam called my son, Claxton, back into service. We had to sell all of our five-hundred acres of farmland, farm machinery, implements, etc. to the highest bidder and it was a great loss. Others have taken up from here and pushed the chicken business to the top. I was there when it was born and in its infancy.

The farmers had a hard time of it and the Federal Land Bank of New Orleans appointed me as their Field Representative to help the borrowers of Clay County and Talladega County. This was an honor that carried a lot of responsibility with it, and added to my already busy life, I

took it. The bank furnished a new Chevrolet and the Land Bank paid the expenses to operate it. I remained at home and went to and fro to Talladega, and all over both counties. I was the only preacher among one hundred men on the job for the Bank of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. I made preaching the Gospel my main business, but worked at other things to pay expenses.

Our son graduated from Clay County High School in 1933 and we went to the World's Fair at Chicago in September. We entered him in Georgia Tech in Atlanta, Georgia. He later worked with construction concerns in Macon, Columbus, Georgia and Tarrant City, and Birmingham, Alabama. He then went into service as an officer in the Corps of Engineers in 1942. He served in Europe and Philippines. Back home in 1945 and married in 1946 to Ola Gay Cotney of Lineville, Alabama. The Reserves got him again in Korea in 1952 and then on to Newfoundland, Canada. He made us proud of his record and promotion to Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The U.S. Congress passed the REA Act that built power and telephone lines in the rural parts of America. In 1937, Mal Jenkins and I collected names and users in Clay County with a five-dollar deposit and a line was built from LaFayette, Alabama in 1939. This was better than our private plant and cheaper. The REA was a real good help as had been the R.F.D. for the mail. I saw the first trip on Route 4, from Ashland in 1902 by (mailman) Punk Blackstock, in a buggy.

My mother died in August of 1940. She had meant everything to me and had been a fond nurse and dear companion to our son for twenty-four years. All of his life up to that time. Ethyl, I and her mother went on a train to the Southern Baptist Convention at Oklahoma City in May of 1949. My father-in-law, Lonza Winford Runyan died on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1948. I was his pastor from 1927 to 1935. In 1945 at Mt. Moriah I baptized eighteen in a farm pond with two sets of twin girls.

My arthritis became active again in August, 1950. Joints swelled, turned red and gave me a fever. This slowed me down and I had a hard time keeping things going. I turned to the doctors all around and no help. I had a vision: Jesus Christ was not crucified in a rocking chair, eating ice cream and cake. Oh no, but on the cross, wearing a crown - not of glory - but a crown of thorns. If it was necessary for Jesus to thus suffer in order to become the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, it was necessary for me, a sinner, to also suffer. Therefore, by the grace of God, I would suffer like a man. The Lord led me and my wife to Dr. W.S. Fay, 500 North Mills St., Orlando, Florida, on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1951, on crutches, almost dead. We stayed with him for thirty days and on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1951, he let us go back home the five hundred and twenty-five miles, and off my crutches and happy. "How much, doctor, do we owe you?" "Nothing." Now what about that. In addition to saving my life, he now had no price tag. This staggered me and my wife. I had committed myself fully into the hands of the other half-dozen doctors and this was like Jesus who never made a charge. Dr. Way said he had respect for my ministry. We thanked him and prayed God's blessings upon him.

Claxton had to make a forced sale (at a loss) of about five-hundred and ninety acres of land and a lot of machinery, equipment, cattle, etc. This was on Lots #1, 9-14 of the Carter Subdivision. The surveyor of the land was Vernon B. Crocker of Tuscumbia in Colbert County. He bought a forty-eight-acre farm lot facing on Monquette Ave. and the S.E. side of Sanford, Florida. The wife and I moved in it on April 15, 1951, to be near Dr. Way and to gain strength. We lived there until September, 1959. We had a good upstairs and downstairs. We lived downstairs and rented out the upper to good tenants, good company, and rent for food. Good

friends all around and I did get stronger up to two hundred pounds. I had come down to one-forty-five and was soon able to work and travel. We had a seven-acre orange grove, bearing as many as six thousand bushels a season. Ethyl and I tended this grove and had a garden; many of our friends came to see us and for Dr. Way to treat them with good results and we were happy.

We bought a choice lot on the corner of Talladega Street and Knowles Ave. in Lineville, Alabama and moved there in November, 1959. The sale documents read 31<sup>st</sup> December 1960 from the previous owners; Dr. V.W. Hogan and his wife, Epsie. It was right next door from Otis and Ola Cotney, Claxton's in-laws. It was surrounded by Pecan trees. I pastored churches until 1969 when I was eighty years.

In 1955, 1957 and 1962 we flew to Stephenville, Newfoundland to visit our son, Claxton and his family on Ernest Harmon Air Force Base. We celebrated our fiftieth wedding anniversary on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1962 and stayed for thirty days in the dead of winter and had a perfect time of joy. Claxton and family (wife Ola Gay, sons' Wayne, Cris and daughter Biki) moved from Ernest Harmon Air Force Base to Woodstock, Ontario, Canada where he opened up a flower shop and garden center and Ola Gay taught highschool. Ethyl had a detached retina in one eye in 1964. I was able to take her to Dr. Smith in Gadsden, Alabama for a successful operation. I looked after her for eight days in the hospital. In 1968, Dr. Smith took cataracts off both eyes successfully. Her niece, Garnet and Lowell Ogletree, took us into their home and it was a godsend to us both. We buried Ethyl's mother the next day after Mother's Day in 1970, at the age of ninety-five.

In 1970, my arthritis began to act up and I took Ethyl and we drove the five hundred and twenty-five miles to see Dr. Way again and he treated me generally and gave me injection in both knees, hips and shoulders, for two weeks. This took the swelling out with no fever. I feel that he had caused me to live again as he did in 1951. Due to my infirmities at the age of eighty-two, we gave up housekeeping and sold our lot and house and went into a housing project in Ashland in June 1971. Ethyl had another operation and I was not able to take care of her. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1972 I flew to Woodstock, Ontario, to live with Claxton and his family at 158 Ingersoll Road and Ethyl flew from Birmingham on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1972. We lived in an adjoining house trailer, brought from Stephenville, Newfoundland by train, until August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1973, when Ethyl had a heart attack and died in the Woodstock General Hospital.

Ethyl's body was flown to Lineville, Alabama for burial. Claxton and his daughter, Biki, took me in a car the thousand miles home. The funeral was at Lystra. She was eighty-three. After a short rest back in Woodstock, Ontario I was able to come back for a last farewell visit here among these people. Claxton took me to Detroit on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1973 and rolled me in a wheel chair to the plane. Pete Gaither met me in Birmingham, Alabama and took me to Ashland to his home on the Friday night. He and his wife Gertrude, were very nice to me.

Elmon Mattox came up there on Sunday morning early and took me to Mt. Olive to preach where I had been twice pastor, from 1927, for fifteen years. A fine fall day, a large crowd, and we all sat together in a lovely place. Doc Burdette was the pastor, his second call. He had entered the ministry when I was at Bowden Grove. I sat in a chair to preach, my first time, and it was 'me', oh Lord, standing in need of prayer, and these dear saints of God did pray for me. They put my chair in the altar and gave me a warm and affectionate farewell that was food for the soul. And we did not expect to see the faces again in this world but shared the mutual hope of seeing each other on the streets of gold and wear the golden slippers up there with my Ethyl and all the redeemed.

Charles Perry took me to see Grandma Julie Forbus, ninety-seven, at her son Garret's nearby and a lot of folks came there to see me. Elmon took me for my last ride over those familiar roads to his home at Gibsonville and Sardis Church, where I was baptized in 1902. Brenton Mann and his wife came to see me there. They were so nice to me.

On Monday morning Elmon took me to see my first cousin, General Lee Duncan, at Alex City. General Lee took me to see Winford Walker, Rayford Harrington, Perino Jordon, and Mary Lou Duncan, widow of Ewell Duncan.

Tuesday morning General Lee took me to see Horse Shoe Bend, a National Park, where General Jackson defeated the Creek Indians in 1814. We crossed the Tallapoosa River, on by Camp Hill to Mt. Zion in Chambers County where I was a pastor in the late 1940's. General Lee left me at the lovely home of Joe and Christine Moss and their daughter Dinah Moss (Estes), who would later become the first deaf juror in the State of Alabama. They called several others and met me at the new church at night for a short service together. We had a short but sweet farewell.

Wednesday morning Joe and Christine Moss took me to see Brother Tom Medders, then on across the Tallapoosa River on a ferry. I remembered baptizing four just above this ferry from Mt. Springs Church in 1950. We stopped in with the Jim Sim's for a few minutes near Mt. Springs, where I had been a pastor. We stopped at Davidson to see O.L. Dunn Jr. and found him in a wheelchair. He had a stroke a few months ago. He and his wife had visited us in Canada. Joe and Christine left me at the B.B. Caldwell's at Corinth and how nice they had been to me. The B.B. Caldwells proved to be a now much needed help to me. Dinner with them and Reverend Zenus Windsor showed up and said he would come for me to go with him next Wednesday night and preach at his church at Rocky Creek, the Lord willing. I was glad to agree. B.B. Caldwell took me to Levis Walker's and blessings on him. Levis took me to Bill McKinney's for Wednesday night and then Bill took me to R.C. Miller's at Bellview.

## **Appendix B:**

Clay County (Alabama) High School Graduates 1933  
List compiled in 1977 CCHS Reunion Committee

Max Alexander, Riley Bonner, Robert Haynes, Warren Horne, Fred Hunt, Grover Johnson, Esrom Kelly, Johnnie Langley, Russell Moon (m. Tenza Belle Doggett), Lowell Ogletree (m. Garnet Gaither), Mallory Ramsey, Claxton Ray (m. Gay Cotney), Hugh Rozelle, Burma Thomaston, Ed Weaver (Deceased), J.D. Williams (De), Evelyn Alford (m. Ralph Maril), Louise Allen (De) (m. Arthur Horn De), Inez Blankenship, Elaine Crompton, Ruth Dison (m. W. Clifton Rowe), Tenza Belle Doggett (m. Russell Moon), Maurine Griffin (m. James Peak), Elva Hornsby, Martha Hooter, Winelle Ingram (m. W. Rilet), Ammie Lou King, Virginia Kirk, Lorene Mayo (De), Ruth Morrison, Lillie McKinney (m. Howard Hickman), Beatrice Smith (m. James Alen Fain), Mattie Lou Tomlin (m. Joe Leigat), Edna Thompson (m. Leon Barker), Mattie Ree Upchurch, Addie Jo young (m. M. Willis).

## **References:**

### **Lineville:**

1. Wikipedia.org *Lineville, Alabama*
2. *Thar's Gold in Them Thar Clay County Hills* by Don C. East PDF file
3. *Some Thoughts on the Bible as the Word of God* by Reverend S. C. Ray, Temple Press, MO, (no ISBN) 1976
4. & 5. *Thar's Gold in Them Thar Clay County Hills* by Don C. East PDF file
6. Lineville College brochure 1896
7. *Small Town Historic Markers*. Alabama Tourism, 2010.

### **Ashland & Clay County:**

1. *A Sketch of Clay County - the Land and its People* by Don C. East
2. *A Brief History of Clay County, Alabama* by Don C. East PDF file
3. Wikipedia.org *Ashland, Alabama*
4. *Some Thoughts on the Bible as the Word of God* by Reverend S. C. Ray, Temple Press, MO, (no ISBN) 1976. Interviews with the Ray family
5. *A Brief History of Clay County, Alabama* by Don C. East PDF file